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ABSTRACT

Through a review of literature on the subject, this paper discusses the dangers of political influence on the demand for educational accountability in Australian schools. Some areas of universities and colleges should remain free from vertical or political accountability, the paper warns. These areas include the values of liberalism and free inquiry, which are more prone to accountability during times of unemployment and recession. Because funding everywhere is being cut, the paper concludes, educators need to differentiate the budget luxuries from the necessities and then be prepared to defend those areas that ought to be free from political direction. Also, educators must be willing to communicate their actions and needs directly with the public, through contact with the media, with relevant interest groups, and with the politicians themselves. (Author/LD)

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ISSUES OF SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

by

Professor R. Scott
Professor of Public Administration
University of Queensland

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ISSUES OF SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Professor R. Scott,
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University of Queensland.

The Conference circular contains the following passage which I would like to take as my point of departure for a rather circuitous tour around the notion of "Social Accountability":

"External examinations have been abolished, permitting the introduction of subjects geared to the needs of new cohorts in our secondary school system. Problems have arisen because the enthusiasm, professional expertise, and high ideals of innovators have not been matched by an awareness of a need for a public relations exercise to prepare the general public for changes. As well, we lack knowledge of the most effective methods to be used to counter the opposition of a small but vocal minority. You'll hear of this in our segment on Social Accountability."

I would like to start by issuing a disclaimer about the authorship of that passage, in order to avoid the accusation of false advertising. I would want to disclaim authorship because so much of it is wrong. First, I am not sure that there is the direct causal relationship asserted in the first sentence to exist between abolishing external examinations and the introduction of subjects geared to the needs of new cohorts. There may be, I'm just not sure, just as I'm not sure that we know enough of the needs of students (as opposed to their wants) to be certain that we have geared up to meet them.¹

Also I would not want to let slip by the implication in that quotation from the brochure that the innovators are always distinguished by enthusiasm, professional expertise and high ideals. Some innovators may be responding to change only because it is forced upon them, some may be inexperienced and unprofessional and still others may be cynical, pragmatic and Machiavellian. I wouldn't want anyone to think that I, for one, assume that only the innovators are entitled to be dressed in white cowboy hats or shining armour. Many innovators are bumbling, incompetent and unprofessional; the nature of their task makes them both visible and accident prone. Again, I have written elsewhere on the notion of professional expertise in the context of accountability and autonomy.² There is much more involved here than mere public relations.

Finally, I would want to disassociate myself from the proposition that "we lack knowledge of the most effective methods to be used to counter the opposition of a small vocal minority". As a political scientist, I would assert that we do have as much knowledge as we need; what is lacking is resources and willingness to work with these resources. Nor would I accept that the implied opposition to innovators is without foundation, or deserving to be "countered". I personally have a deep philosophical commitment to the encouragement of dissent as a basis for the advancement of learning. I would not want to deny this right of dissent to any minority, however wrong-headed it might be in not bowing to the dictates of the professionals. Indeed, from my own research into the fundamentalist groups active in this state concerning aspects of education policy, I have concluded that there have been some valuable spin-offs from their activities.³ While I abhor the fact that they have extended State censorship of curriculum from malpractice into accepted dogma, I also recognise that their success underlined the extent to which teachers and their educators in tertiary institutions were getting out of touch with political and social realities.

On page 2 of the brochure, those attending the conference are promised a galaxy of talent in each session - first someone distinguished, then a reactor and then an eminent educationist. I am sorry to have got you here on false pretences on the first count. I am more "distinctive" rather than "distinguished" - distinctive in having had only a passing exposure to the non-tertiary sector of the education industry. When in Canberra I posed for a while as a "professional lay person", being chairman of a primary school board when they first started under the aegis of Phil Hughes and Hedly Beare. This led me to write somewhat bitterly on the theme of "participatory impotence".⁴ Since coming here, my wife and I have found a certain morbid fascination with the activities of diverse interest groups active in the education sector. But I still bear the rather doubtful label - not of educationist but political scientist, or even more doubtfully, that of "public administrationist".⁵

In as much as I have anything to offer the real experts on education assembled here in front of me, it relates to my study of politics as a practical

and philosophical activity and my own experience in the tertiary sector. Both here and in Canberra I have taken a keen interest in the decisionmaking processes of the institution in which I try to function. I have sought to understand both the immediate and the external environment and to make sense of what causes decisions to be made which affect me. For a student of administration, it is the ultimate in navel-gazing. But, to conclude my reference to the brochure, I agree with the anonymous author that we do need to understand more clearly the decisionmaking processes which affect our collective destinies, as well as "the demands peculiar to each sector." The sectors are inextricably intertwined by the nature of the training and recruitment processes which operate in all states. If I seem to concentrate on the tertiary sector, this is partly because it is the one I know best and partly because I believe all of education will suffer if that sector is allowed to be "whipped into line" by governments acting in the name of social accountability. Indeed, as my text for the morning I would propose Nilsson's axiom that "to punish academics is very good politics."⁶

Let us recall just how widespread these demands are and how popular those who espouse the cause of accountability can become in an era where politicians are searching for scapegoats to blame for their own inadequacies. Remember in particular that this is not a new phenomenon. Over two years ago I made the following comment in my inaugural lecture:

"There is now a vast repertoire of criticisms which can be drawn upon but most of the themes are touched upon in television current affairs programs such as Peter Samuels and Don Chipp on *Monday Conference*⁷ and summarized in the following newspaper item:

EDUCATION FUNDING 'OUT OF CONTROL'

The Minister for Education, Mr Jones, claimed yesterday that the funding arrangements for tertiary education had got out of control. The free education system introduced by the Labor Government had set a growth pattern in tertiary institutions that did not reflect the true needs of the community. The system had encouraged competition between institutions, which vied for increasing per capita grants to undertake more courses requiring more buildings to cope with the increasing number of students. "It is because of the faults and weaknesses inherent in the present funding arrangements that I have supported the Federal Government's stocktaking in the whole field of tertiary education," he said.

"Rationalization must relate to the needs of the community and accountability meant more than just financial responsibility. It also meant accountability to society - to provide not only what potential students thought they needed but to offer courses that society needed. Institutions must relate more

directly to community needs than they had in the past. They did not have the sole right to determine their own destiny under the current funding arrangements."⁶

The most recent version of this line of attack has appeared in that literally sensational journal, *Penthouse*.⁹ If the publication is still legal in Queensland, I commend it to the audience (if it's not legal, than I may be guilty of incitement to commit a crime). In the immediate aftermath of reading this article, I was tempted to sub-title my talk "in defence of bullshit". But this seemed on reflection to make the mistake of joining the author in the barnyard of his own journalism.

THE FAILURE OF EDUCATION

There has been a disaster in Australian tertiary education, a torrent of money poured into universities and colleges of advanced education in the past decade has left these institutions bloated with students, wealthy beyond the dreams of their forebears and totally corrupted in their intellectual standards, bewildered and confused about what they are supposed to be doing. They are rotten with over-indulgence in expansion and in the wild, greedy, slaving race by their controllers for bigger jobs, more students, more pay. It has been a disgusting spectacle: one which simply underlines again the importance of imposing harsh controls on the use of public money. What is there to show for the great boom of the Seventies on Australian tertiary education?

We got an army of half-baked, half-educated, misinformed, crammed, bored, bigoted and confused "liberal arts" majors; we got a corps of equally confused, frightened and misinformed "business and commerce studies majors"; and finally we got wave upon wave of resentful, lazy, half-baked school teachers.

The past ten years have seen massive destruction of tertiary education through the "forced feed" of masses of students through the bullshit courses.

The tertiary education system in Australia has developed along the following lines: vast quantities of money are pumped in at one end and vast quantities of half-bake~~d~~ graduates in bullshit courses in liberal arts (of which the major categories are English, History, Philosophy, Modern Languages), teacher training and business studies, come out the other end.

A second article in the same journal provided a more dignified attack along the same lines, including the following ominous sentence:¹⁰

"Quite apart from the issues of how much is being spent and how high is the standard of instruction, the validity of what is being taught must also be questioned."

The true threat posed by a notion of social accountability is encapsulated in the assertion that society might legitimately seek to dictate to tertiary institutions what they teach rather than merely requiring that the institutions themselves operate effectively and efficiently - i.e., how they teach. There is clearly a close connection between the "what" and the "how" since taxpayers have a keen interest in the directions in which their money is spent by teachers. But the real threat to the tertiary sector is posed not by demands for accountability per se but by demands to control what is taught beyond a very general specification of the standards appropriate to particular professional qualifications. The essence of tertiary institutions, sometimes glibly defined as "academic freedom", is that residue of autonomy which involves the defence of the values of tolerance and dissent - found most conspicuously in the very area labelled as bullshit by Mr Newton of *Penthouse*.

If we are to accept any area of protection, then we must also be able to define more clearly what is meant by accountability. This is a theme which has been examined on a number of occasions and often in contradictory ways. The most recent collection of views that I have seen is in a set of papers assembled by HERDSA and edited by Sheldrake and Linke.¹¹ It may assist our discussions if I examine these papers in detail since they indicate some of the confusions and disagreements over what could possibly be meant by "social accountability". As Harman and Johnson point out in their paper, "Because the terms 'society' and 'community' mean different things to different people, to say that higher education institutions are or should be accountable to society or the community does not tell us very much at all."¹²

The authors in this collection are generally guilty of a failure to confront some of the genuine grounds for claims being advanced for greater accountability. Many of them refuse to recognise that there are skeletons in the

academic cupboards which need to be dragged out into the hard light of day, rather than shrouded in an all-embracing blanket labelled academic freedom. That blanket will wear too thin if it seems to be covering too much; its use needs to be restricted to those areas of activity in institutions of higher education where it really matters. Because it does really matter that the blanket remains intact, the essential role of institutions of higher education will rapidly evaporate if they are left naked and vulnerable to direct and unrestricted governmental interference.

Several of the papers traverse roughly similar ground, particularly in defining key terms like accountability. But it is here that the woolliness and inconsistency creep in. Not everybody is talking about the same thing and there is a particular tendency to confuse accountability and responsibility. It is with great relief that one gets to the final chapter and finds that Nilsson is equally unimpressed by the methodological and semantic imprecision. While paying tribute to those authors who do have a clear knowledge of what they are about (Chippendale, for example), Nilsson carefully kicks great holes in the platitudes and inconsistencies of many other contributors to the volume and of others whose writings are quoted.

One of the main problems is that the authors each conceive that they have a vested interest to defend - CAE's, teacher educators, staff associations and their concern for redundancy, universities, manpower economists, etc. This leads into special pleading in a number of cases. In particular, there is disagreement about whether universities are really so special that they need treatment which differentiates their level of accountability from that of CAE's. (TAFE scarcely gets a mention, reinforcing the definitional convention which seems to be gaining ground that higher education is a subset of tertiary education). The university protagonists almost to a man (and they are all men contributors) quote Partridge in his comments on this subject in his report on Western Australia. Nobody then goes on (except Nilsson) to examine what a concern for national or international standards means in specific terms of accountability in contrast to CAE's. Add the blanket assertion of "academic freedom" and the whole university system can be justifiably left to rely on its own devices.

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The problem with all this is that the initiative for demanding accountability to governments rests with the governments and not the institutions themselves. Generalised notions of responsibility - to clients, students, parents, communities, professions, interest groups, peer groups, metaphysical ideals or whatever - cut no ice with governments unless they can be made to cut some ice with the voting public. There may well be some sort of ruling class conspiracy to "vocationalize" higher education to render it impotent, as Hyde suggests,¹³ but merely asserting alternative patterns of responsibility will not defeat it. It seems more likely anyway that the current criticism of education spending has deeper roots than the preference of a small group of individuals, even those who constitute a hypothetical ruling class.

Chippendale's paper, coming straight after Hyde's, provides a valuable counterpoint to the conspiracy theory, outlining the basis of recent Commonwealth involvement. He sets the issue of education in its broader political and administrative context of inter-governmental relations and is less pessimistic about the inevitability of total centralisation. In conclusion, he notes that,

"In the long term view it appears inevitable that these (political) limitations will constrain the operation of procedures for accountability, which, for the moment, at the federal level, loom large for tertiary institutions. The future accountability of tertiary education institutions is inevitably caught up in the ebb and flow of the status-conscious bargaining which characterises Commonwealth-State relations in this country."¹⁴

The chapter by Ramsey and Howlett is one of the more distinguished in the collection,¹⁵ concentrating on the internal arrangements for accountability within institutions. In particular it draws attention to the deleterious effects of formula budgeting in the absence of alternative performance indicators when it comes to qualitative judgements. It also looks at the management implications of the bureaucratic and collegiate models of decisionmaking and raises basic issues which separate accountability for the quality and nature of the education provided from issues of tenure and academic freedom. They utter in their conclusion the same warning which occurs in several other papers - that institutions will have to be prepared to adopt new structural arrangements or face having such changes imposed externally. Burke and McKenzie concern themselves

more with efficient use of resources and responsiveness to community needs, and they conclude by pointing to the real "bogey man" - the anti-intellectualism of Australian society and its political influentials. Referring in particular to the critical character of social sciences, they see that

"the problem of the public being aware of the activities of tertiary institutions and their possible opposition to some of these activities could be very real in future years."¹⁶

Some of us feel Queensland is already in this future but we have to recognise that these are remarkably undemocratic sentiments.

And so to the Nilsson mentioned earlier. As a philosopher, he claims no particular expertise in educational administration - apart from his observations as a practising academic. But he does bring a healthy scepticism to the whole exercise and unpacks the semantic importance of prepositions. In particular, he clearly distinguishes between accountability and responsibility by arguing that accountability only makes sense in the notion of being accountable to another person. By contrast, one can (and does) feel generally responsible for something without necessarily being held accountable to someone.

At the risk of vastly over-simplifying his subtle (and amusingly presented) argument, he links accountability with the context of blame and punishment. Responsibility of a generalised kind is transformed into hard accountability when it hurts after you have made an error in judgement. (There is a soft meaning of accountability - merely giving a formal account - which has the potential to harden if someone happens to be listening closely and decides to act, e.g. on a report of a university to parliament).

It is this capacity for punishment which is the core of accountability: as Nilsson notes, "the paradigm of an action or activity failing under the concept 'punishment' is the deliberate infliction by someone in authority, and according to rule, of something unpleasant on an offender because of something he had done or left undone."¹⁷ He then states his axiom that "to punish academics is currently very good politics". It is this punitive/political character of accountability which needs to be singled out from all the slack logic surrounding the notion of accountability defined as a multi-faceted or hydra-headed monster.

If political accountability - with its capacity for inflicting punishment - is at the centre of the debate on social accountability, on what grounds can such accountability be resisted? In a recent address to the Royal Institute of Public Administration and the Society of Accountants, Professor Hodgetts, a leading public administration scholar from Canada, offered the following analysis.¹⁸ He saw four major types of accountability - vertical accountability (to the political leadership linked through the bureaucratic hierarchy), outward accountability to clients, lateral accountability to peer groups and inward accountability to individual judgement and morality.

Applying Hodgett's classification to education, it is clear that it is the vertical accountability that hurts. If education fails to please our political masters at state or federal level, then educators are punished by having their funds cut off. Gone is the Whitlam heyday when any plausible fool could sell an idea and get public funds and public employment to indulge himself. In the process, the pruning shears have cut out some deadwood, but regrettably it is often the best and the brightest who are being cut out; the indolent, under-qualified and incompetent go soldiering on to damage the cause of education even further. I know this to be a problem in universities and CAE's; I suspect the same may apply at the school level.

The conference members might want to examine the Hodgett directions of accountability more closely in the context of the individual school - especially the issue of vertical accountability.

Increasingly, the other levels of accountability are becoming dependent variables, contributing to vertical accountability but not themselves independent of that central control over funds. Thus accountability to clientele in education now takes the form of competition for students because of the formula budgetting which ties an institution's name to its gross numbers. This is now a well-established dynamic in the tertiary sector, as institutions, departments and individual teachers adjust their behaviour to maximise the numbers that they can attract. (From a brief news item, it seems that the effect of unzoning schools in the A.C.T. is having a similar effect there, with newspaper advertisements

now touting for custom just like most of their tertiary big brothers). The threat to academic standards is obvious, particularly when the punishment for failure to attract students may mean lowered financial expectations or even redundancy. Suddenly, clients have a capacity to hurt where previously they had to take what the educators served up to them. But -given the inevitable threat to standards posed by chasing warm bodies for financial gain - the instruments of vertical accountability are then placed under greater stress. It is clearly not in the political interests of any government to reduce the education system to a laughing stock inhabited by Mickey Mouses. (Mickey Mice?)

The same problem applies to lateral accountability - to peer groups. Much has been said - in the book quoted earlier and by education spokesmen elsewhere - about the need for Australia's leading tertiary institutions to set the tone of the whole education sector by adhering to international standards in all they do. And Harman and Johnston in that book make the very sensible recommendation that we ought to adopt the procedures of British universities in using leading figures from other academic institutions as external examiners across the whole range of teaching activities, not just as thesis examiners. They also advocate greater use of institutional reviews of the type practised by the A.N.U. (perhaps because they are so obviously under the noses of their political masters and have traditionally been the envy of other less-lavishly financed institutions). Much depends on the motivation of those who have generated the idea of the review and are responsible for its implementation. A similar review was recently undertaken at the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education covering the whole institution. It is still not clear whether this has had any impact on the functioning of the institute.¹⁹

These sorts of devices are undoubtedly capable of inflicting pain if their reports are unfavourable and the recommendations then constitute the basis for action by the political/administrative decisionmakers who control the relevant bags of public gold. Again, a dependent variable. But one which is capable of being manipulated by the educators themselves since peer group evaluation operates in two directions. It will be very easy for a rather cosy relationship

to emerge if the evaluators and evaluated are constantly swapping hats. Appealing to professional integrity may work in some circumstances but there is an equal likelihood that back-scratching may prevail, just as it does in so many other professions such as law and medicine. Even on an international scale, there is likely to be a closing of ranks among "us" educators against "them" paymasters; after all, the same process of threatening education with massive retrenchment is a universal phenomenon. The only alternative is to have the political leadership recruit a pariah class of evaluators, charged with guarding the sacred flame of standards, both academic and administrative. (This may already be happening as states staff up their central regulatory agencies from among the ranks of the mobile senior academics). At an institutional level, there is an increasing tendency for concerned senior administrators like Vicechancellors or Directors to appoint middle-management supervisors (fulltime "super-deans") divorced from loyalty to particular disciplines and particular staff groupings.

But it must be clear that peer group evaluation is a weak basis for defence against demands for greater vertical autonomy. The A.M.A. and the Bar Association may have got away with defending their autonomy by way of self-regulating professional groupings, but even they are under threat from radical or even reformist governments; it seems unlikely that politicians are going to allow educators to "get away" with the same sort of arrangement - unlike medicine, education is not literally a matter of life and death; unlike lawyers, regrettably few educators win election to parliament. An alternative strategy is to colonise the relevant section of the bureaucracies, along the lines so successfully developed by the R.S.L. with respect to the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Health, and this may already be happening accidentally as educators are recruited into the departments at state and federal level. But, in the wider political arena, there will be plenty of politicians who will successfully pour scorn on a defence of autonomy based upon the opinions of our own colleagues.

This is even more true of a claim to "social" accountability based on a structure of control where the local community is represented on boards of management. In some cases, these boards are vehicles for individuals to ride

pet hobby-horses either in defence of the institutions or in criticism of some particular aspect of its activities.

In others, the management board is a "front" for a group of other educators testing their administrative and educational theories in a different context - this was certainly the result of a survey which was conducted into the membership of school boards in the A.C.T.²⁰ and it is noticeable that councils of CAE's in urban areas often contain members from other tertiary institutions. All of which contributes to peer group "accountability" but adds very little to genuine community "accountability" - indeed, we ought not to use these terms at all but settle for the weaker notion of "responsiveness".

The argument gets even more tenuous when this claim to accountability rests on internal values and judgements. This is not to deny that individual teachers feel a high sense of "responsibility" for what they do, but there is an apparent semantic nonsense in the notion of "internal accountability". St Joan tried this line of defence of "inner voices" and look what the authorities did to her. Vertical accountability indeed.

Is Plato dead then? What is to become of the philosopher - kings who wore the blanket of academic freedom like robes of office. Must educators knuckle under to a servile relationship with their political masters and stand idly by while the academic empires crumble?

I would contend that there are special areas where universities and colleges ought not to be accountable to governments. But these special areas will get ignored if the tertiary institutions try to defend themselves against all demands for political accountability. Following Nilsson, it is possible to claim that there are areas of activity where the role-responsibility of academics requires them not to subordinate their professional judgement to that of their political masters (or of their students, for that matter). In this sense, it would be irresponsible for them to be held accountable.

What, then, are these special areas? What is it that distinguishes tertiary institutions - or the education function as a whole which derives so much stimulus from the tertiary sector? At the risk of sounding sanctimonious, it

is the preservation of liberal values against the nature and wholly comprehensible demands exerted on education from politicians acting in the name of the community.

These demands become strongest in times of growing unemployment, part of which may be related to government's own policies and part of which may be due to universal technological and social changes. But is the task of educators to resist these demands insofar as they contradict the values of liberalism - of free enquiry - which are the essence of true education and vital to the long-term well-being of the total community. Like conservationism or parity oil-pricing, this is a difficult argument to make because it involves foregoing immediate benefits for long-run gains based on current assumptions.

The crucial areas where vertical accountability can legitimately be resisted must be publicly defended in these value-oriented terms, in terms of the role of education as a basis for social progress through its obligation to question the basis of conventional wisdom and prevailing ideologies - in all fields of enquiry but particularly in the area relating to the activities of government itself. Hodgetts' lecture on accountability noted that there were special circumstances where a democratic system might depart from the notion of direct vertical accountability and instanced the publicly-owned mass communications media and CBC in particular. Whereas he generally favoured a tight parliamentary control over funding of wholly-controlled government instrumentalities, he saw that there was a special need of access to information free from political hindrance if the electorate was to be able to make a reasoned judgement about the performance of the government. For this reason, he preferred to insulate the broadcasting authorities through a public corporation.

We might well have quoted the Jeffersonian rubric which appears each day above the Editorial in the Brisbane Courier-Mail: "Our liberty depends on the Freedom of the Press and that cannot be limited without being lost."

I would argue that the same¹⁴ proposition applies to academic freedom, that it will be lost if governments seek to inhibit institutions in what they teach.

This is a point made in a spirited way by Charles Carter, former Vice-Chancellor of Lancaster University.

"British universities, though largely dependent on Government money are to a degree insulated from Government control by the interposition of the University Grants Committee, a body largely composed of academics from the universities themselves. This device is widely regarded as ingenious and desirable, and particularly admired by our American friends, who perhaps see in it the academic equivalent of handing over the State control of gambling to the Mafia. ... So long as Government and the universities are at arm's length, the university system can preserve some of the variety and vitality which, in economic life, is attributed to free private enterprise. Mutual ignorance is a defence of freedom". 21

Once the notion of being accountable extends to an accountability for teaching the "right" things, then one of the basic democratic freedoms of the whole society can be undermined. Within a single generation, the educated will be thinking what the government decides that they ought to think because of its control over curriculum, *defended in the name of seeking a system more responsive to community needs.*

Much earlier, I quoted Hyde's fear about the threat to "vocationalize" the education system. While not accepting that there is much evidence to support the idea that there is some dreaded conspiracy at work, this does *not* detract from the seriousness of the threat itself. This determination to make course content "relevant" to the needs of employers too easily slips into a determination to make courses palatable to the government and free from "un-vocational" critical elements which, by definition, are irrelevant to "the real world".

This is by no means a new phenomenon and has been pointed out as far back as the colonial origins of the larger metropolitan universities. Gardner's book, *Colonial Cap and Gown*, makes interesting reading. Discussing Sydney

and Melbourne Universities, he pointed to the extent to which these new institutions were moulded to meet local needs and had to resist the financial pressures towards vocationalism. He indicated the dominant themes as the politics of regionalism, the "numbers game" used to conceal a lack of student demand, the liberating effect of accidental budgetary surpluses due to the gold rush and the contrast between the populist-vocational rhetoric and the elitist-liberal values which were pursued in practice. He could have been describing the 1960s and 1970s, particularly with respect to the CAE sector.²³

Much has been written about the "evils" of vocationalism since the Martin Report.²⁴ Five years ago, I wrote a paper which confronted this problem in the teaching of public administration and argued in favour of including a core study of political science as a basis for informed social criticism. I asserted than that,

"If vocationalism is to remain the dominant organisational ethic of tertiary institutions, then it is the crucial function of the study of social sciences - and political science in particular - to ensure that the balance is struck between the attainment of specific skills and the transmission of values related to the exercise of those skills ... the study of political theory seems fundamental if educational objectives are to include the acquisition of that independence of mind which is basic to the operation of exercising democratic choice."²⁵

We must resist the notion that education can ever be - or should ever be - value-free training for a specific vocation; the danger lies in the attempt by governments to impose their particular values on the curriculum and so defend the status quo in terms of vocational relevance.

This is not a proposition peculiar to tertiary institutions. An eminent and respected member of this College has very recently made the same argument in relation to the current Queensland debate on education where vocationalism also rears its head: In a letter to the *Gourier Mail*, Bill Bassett responded to Labor Party spokesmen who would "weed out" teachers and college lecturers whose values were suspect²⁶ and truncate before grade 10 the school careers of those who only needed a limited training to earn a living.²⁷ Bassett argued that,

"the virtual identification of the role of school with vocational training is a serious error, and it is important that our politicians who have such an important influence on the quality of our education system could have a more balanced view. The school has an important role in laying the foundations for effective vocational education, either on the job or in its technical and tertiary institutions, and in giving children an introduction to the world of work, but its main purpose is general education, with much wider objectives than specific job training. Among these wider objectives are an understanding of the structure and functioning of our society, and the cultivation of a sense of responsibility in participating in it in an informed and critical spirit. This is a major role that society should set for its schools, and it is unlikely that a free society can become a reality without well-educated citizens."²⁸

I believe that all of us would do well to associate ourselves with these sentiments and actively seek to convert public opinion to our side rather than let the ambiguities of "vocationalism" lead education in totalitarian directions.

The article by Carter quoted above makes a similar point concerning accountability and autonomy in British universities:

"The exercise of such freedom of decision (in relation to curriculum) is only tolerable if universities can be seen to be sensitive to the needs and ideas of the general community. The successful defence of university autonomy and freedom would be more assured if academics would only cultivate a greater humility and show a greater willingness to listen. A natural reaction to those who always sound as if they know best (and who probably believe it, too) is to question their right to do what they like; such attitudes stimulate the desire for control."²⁹

On the home front, Senator Button has been making similar points with respect to the whole tertiary sector. While being sympathetic to the needs for academic freedom and liberal values (small-L of course), he stresses that

"the tertiary education system, and the people involved in it, have to think a little harder than they have in the past about these sorts of questions ... there is (also) a degree of complacency in the way universities are managed. Universities object to being criticised for alleged financial excesses, but these is a fair obligation to set their own houses in order because every example of an alleged extravagance is detrimental to the notion of academic study in the community."³⁰

As teachers of whatever level, we must accept that the citadel of learning is under attack. Funding everywhere is being cut and we need to be able to differentiate the luxuries from the necessities, to redraw the frontiers in order to defend more effectively those areas which ought to be proof from political direction. Vertical accountability is here to stay; once the political

searchlight was pointed in our direction, it was inevitable that demands would be made to demonstrate value-for-taxpayers' money. In a sense the education industry has become a victim of its own success in attracting government funding on an unprecedented scale as demands for its products rose. Now, in a world-wide recession, the auditors have been called in. Some of us might even welcome this, even though there are costs to be borne. On balance the system is a lot healthier than it was 23 years ago when I first entered it, but it is politically naive to expect that the expansion since then could continue forever without someone, sometime, calling the educators to account.

The politicians need to be confronted with a measured response which indicates a willingness to meet the demands of taxpayers for efficiency and effectiveness in the use of their funds. Educators must be willing to communicate directly with the public, through the media, through contact with relevant interest groups and contact with the politicians themselves. They must be ready to get out and "Mix it" and apply their undoubted enthusiasm and intelligence to this major activity. Merely bitching about "accountability" as a major evil suddenly sprung upon us without warning will not win us any friends outside the already converted - and we need friends, lots of them, among parents, voters and opinion-leaders.³¹ Accountability is a central theme in the ideology of competitive party democracy; if we subscribe to that ideology and the liberal values which it ought to enshrine, then we shouldn't knock accountability just because it hurts. It's meant to hurt.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Roger Scott, "Teacher Education and Public Accountability - Is the Customer Always Right?", Phoenix - The Journal of the Queensland Association of Teacher Educators, Vol 2, No 1, May 1979. Reprinted in Alumni, University of Queensland, November 1979.
- 2 Roger Scott, "Towards a Professional Public Service" in R. Smith and P. Weller, Public Service Enquiries in Australia, University of Queensland Press, 1978; "Government Service as a Profession - A Keynote Address" in J. Forrest (ed.), Government Service as a Profession, R.I.P.A. Queensland Regional Group, 1978; "Themes in Public Service Reform: Is Queensland Beyond Criticism", The Professional Officer, Brisbane, September, 1979.
- 3 See Ann Gowers and Roger Scott, Fundamentals and Fundamentalists: Politics and Education in Queensland, APSA Monograph No 22, Flinders University, 1979; Ann and Roger Scott, Reform and Reaction in the Deep North: The Education Policy Process in Queensland, Melbourne University Press, 1980.
- 4 Roger Scott and Frank Morgan, "Participatory Impotence - Local Community Involvement in A.C.T. Schools", ACEA Bulletin, 9, 1976; reprinted in Mulford et al, A.C.T. Papers on Education, Canberra College of Advanced Education, 1976.
- 5 This rather odd-looking term is used to distinguish the students of public administration from the practitioners who might reasonably be termed "public administrators". The word "administrationist" was coined by Professor Dwight Waldo. See, for example, his chapter, "Education for Public Administration in the Seventies", in R. Mosher (ed.), American Public Administration - Past, Present and Future, University of Alabama Press, 1975.
- 6 N.A. Nilsson, "Accountability: Philosophy and Practice", in P. Sheldrake and R. Linke, Accountability in Higher Education, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1979, p. 142.
- 7 Peter Samuels, "Colleges and Universities", Monday Conference, 3 October 1977. Peter Jones, Minister of Education, Western Australia, reported in West Australian, Perth, 13 October 1977.
- 8 Roger Scott, Education and Public Accountability, University of Queensland Press, 1979. Reprinted in New Journal of Advanced Education, Vol 7, No 5, August 1978.
- 9 M. Newton, "The Failure of Education", Penthouse, March 1980, pp 44-52.
- 10 David Hurst, "Australia's Worst Colleges", Penthouse, March 1980, pp 138-144.
- 11 Sheldrake and Linke, op cit. This section is based on my forthcoming review in Australian Journal of Public Administration.
- 12 G.S. Harman and R.St.C. Johnson, Academic Accountability: Courses and Programs, in Sheldrake and Linke, op cit, pp 103-104.
- 13 J. Hyde, "The Structure of Higher Education" in Sheldrake and Linke, op cit, p. 14.

- 14 P. Chippendale, "Accountability at the Federal Level", in Sheldrake and Linke, op cit, p. 31.
- 15 G.A. Ramsey and G. Howlett, *Institutional Structures and Internal Accountability*", in Sheldrake and Linke, op cit.
- 16 G. Burke and P.A. McKenzie, "Academic Accountability - Resources", In Sheldrake and Linke, op cit, p. 99.
- 17 Nilsson, op cit, pp 142-143.
- 18 J.E. Hodgetts, *Financial Control and Accountability in Government*", Joint Seminar of the Australian Society of Accountants and the Royal Institute of Public Administration, University of Queensland, 28 February 1980
- 19 For details of the diagnosis and recommendations of the review panels, see Alby Jones, Roger Scott and Allan Skertchley, *Report of an Organisational Review Committee*, Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, 1978.
- 20 Scott and Morgan, op cit.
- 21 Charles Carter, "The British Universities and the State: A Comment", Higher Education, Vol 9, no 1, 1980, p. 1.
- See in particular the Sixth Interim Report of the Select Committee on Education in Queensland, entitled Post-Secondary Education, tabled on 4 October 1979.

It is important for the argument about accountability not to be diverted into the by-way of claims that reforms will lead to increased efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of services. As Peter Wilenski has clearly demonstrated in a recent article based in parts on personal experience,

"the process of reform, apart from the stress on efficiency, is usually explained in value-neutral terms. The program of the enquiry, it is claimed, will result in the job being done better or more quickly or more cheaply. However, if one looks more closely at the reasons for the establishment of such programs and enquiries, it is clear that underlying the urge to change the administration, there is a dissatisfaction not so much with the way in which decisions are carried out, as with the decisions themselves. The "hidden agenda" of most reforms is to ensure that different decisions are taken and different outcomes in the community result (Proposed administrative changes) result in different decisions being taken about the allocation of public resources. They result in shifts of power within the bureaucracy and in the community at large - in short the reallocation of public resources and benefits ... many of the really important reforms of administration are basically political in character and this political aspect is often hidden because the political nature of administration is hidden."

P. Wilenski, "Political Problems of Administrative Responsibility and Reform", Australian Journal of Public Administration, Vol XXXVIII, No 4, December 1979, p. 347. (emphasis added)

- 23 W. Gardner, *Colonial Cap and Gown*, Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 1975.

- 24 See in particular Jean Ely, *Reality and Rhetoric: An Alternative History of Australian Education*, Alternative Publish Co-operative Limited, 1978 and Robert Birrell, *"Neo-Capitalism in Australia: The Case of the Colleges of Advanced Education"*, in Don Edgar, *Social Change in Australia*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1974.

Partridge made the perceptive prediction back in 1963 that changes in the level of government involvement in the tertiary sector would lead inevitably to bureaucratic pressures for conformity and greater attention to an outside body's conception of "the public interest". (P.H. Partridge, *"Australian Universities - Some Trends and Problems"*, *Australian University*, Vol. 1, No 1, 1963). He could scarcely have predicted that he would play such an active role in assisting in this process while stoutly defending the universities' interests.

Carter was also conscious of this pressure for interference and offered the following counsel:

"To get the best in this delicate situation, the universities will need considerable political adroitness, and a good judgement of when to stand firm in defence of freedom and when to bend to public pressure. When concessions are needed, they should be originated and planned in the universities themselves, not forced on them by outside judgements." (Carter, *op cit*, p. 5)

- 25 Roger Scott, *"Vocationalism and the Teaching of Politics in CAE's"*, in G. Harman and R. Scott (eds), *Teaching Politics in Colleges of Advanced Education*, Australian National University Press, 1975, p. 145.
- 26 "Weed Out Unfit Tutors: Casey", headline, *Courier-Mail*, Brisbane, 19 March 1980.
- 27 Report of a speech by Mr Wright, ALP, Rockhampton, *Courier-Mail* Brisbane, 21 March 1980.
- 28 "Education: Job Training or Preparing for Life?", Letter to the Editor from Professor G.W. Bassett, *Courier-Mail*, Brisbane, 26 March 1980.
- 29 Carter, *op cit*, p. 3.
- 30 J. Button, *The Australian*, 12 March, 1980.
- 31 It's not only the teachers who need friends; consider the problem of our graduates from schools, CAE's and universities who have accepted the liberal ethic which many of us would regard as the essence of education and find themselves unemployed through no fault of their own. A recent University of Queensland survey reported that

"a number of respondents found themselves wondering if education was a waste of time, particularly when faced with community attitudes which suggested that their qualifications were more a liability than an asset. Their investment had been such that they felt the need to keep convincing themselves that their education had not been wasted. One graduate commented that his long-held belief that education is not about mere 'job training' was severely tested when it was confronted with the hard reality of being unemployed. He went on to say that the university should make a more positive effort to convince both the public and the employers of the intrinsic value of education." (University of Queensland Counselling Services: *A Report on a Survey of the Destination of 1978-79 University of Queensland Graduates*, Publication No 13, November 1979, p.35).